THE KING'S COLLEGE

BIRD CLUB

Personal reminiscences and an outline of its history

by

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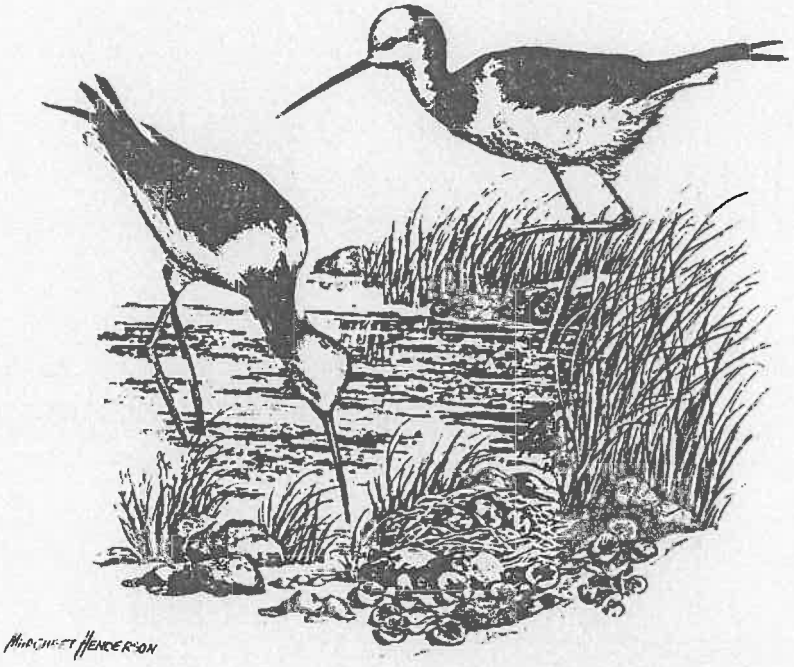

KING'S COLLEGE BIRD CLUB.

Any educational institute that is worth its salt runs some sort of Field Club whose aim is to make at least some of its pupils aware of their local heritage of nature, namely the more obvious fauna and flora of the district in which they are currently spending much of their young lives.

When King's College moved from Remuera to Middlemore in 1922, it moved virtually into the country. Otahuhu, Mangere and Papatoetoe were not the industrialised areas and crowded residential suburbs that they are today. The big trees and playing fields of King's College and the long fairways of the adjacent Auckland Golf Club are now a welcome green oasis on an urbanised isthmus. Fertile Mangere's dairy farms, orchards and cropping lands have long been in retreat.

Between 1923 and 1932 L. (Birdy) Delph encouraged boys to take an interest in natural history. Charles Fleming often mentioned how much he owed to 'Birdy' and also to the early issues of the Transactions of the R.S.N.Z. in the small dusty library. Arthur Hunt also found time to encourage boys along the same lines. He was a cultured housemaster with enlightened ideas about a broadly based education and the need for cultivating the arts and music. Soon after I joined the staff at King's in the Spring of 1939, I was invited to accompany a Field Club trip to Titirangi in the Waitakere Ranges which lie to the west of Auckland. This was my first experience of the mixed rain-forest of northern New Zealand: I was properly impressed by the size of such trees as kauri and rimu; and by the profusion and variety of ferns; nor had I ever seen in the wild such an elegant orchid as **Pterostylis banksii.** But the birds, to be frank, were disappointingly scarce. Perhaps the time of day was wrong. Now fifty years later, I still find birding in the Waitakeres rather a dull exercise. The botanists are much more richly rewarded. Ornithologically the diverse coast of the Auckland Isthmus with its many inlets, creeks and estuaries looked far more promising. King's is

situated beside the main railway-line south of Otahuhu. Most of the staff and boys had bicycles. It was an accepted rule that the boarders could ride as far as they liked, in such leisure time as there was, west and south of the railway. Thus in the 1940's the Bird Club was largely a bicycle brigade, exploring every track that led to the shores of the Manukau Harbour and the crater-swamps of Papatoetoe and Puhinui. Among the local farmers, the McLaughlins and the Selfs, whose sons later attended the school, were very helpful, and were indeed interested in what was found.

In the two decades before the runways of the international airport were pushed far out over the tidal flats where formerly thousands of Black Swans cropped the abundant **zostera,** many boys were happy to feel the clean mud and sand between their toes from Wiri Creek to Ihumatao and round the point to the old causeway that led to Puketutu Island. Nearer the school, Mangere Inlet was polluted with the waste from meatworks, tanneries and factories; no fit place for paddling; but tens of thousands of gulls, godwits and stilts fed eagerly on its broad expanse of soft ooze. Although the numbers fluctuated seasonally, they were usually impressive. To the east of the school and at our back, the upper creeklets of the Tamaki and the fringes of the golf course provided many a fruitful ramble. Banded Rails scuttled among the mangroves and even tried to nest in the long grass of abandoned kumara-pits.

K.C.B.C. was enlisted as a corporate member of O.S.N.Z. right from the start. For despite the restrictions on travel inevitably imposed by W.W.II. the Society was eager to show the flag and to start collecting ornithological data from every corner of the country. Many of King's boarders came from remote rural areas of the North Island. They were encouraged to keep their eyes open during their holidays and to report their findings and in some instances to bring back the evidence. Now, (1989) more than forty years on, some still do!

To a young bird-watcher, the spacious well-planted grounds of King's were a favourable starting point, since they were set on a very narrow part of the

isthmus. More than sixty species of birds have now been listed in the immediate vicinity. Seasonally, one after another, flights of godwits and knots streamed across the skies directly overhead, their movements dictated by the difference in time between Tasman and Pacific tides. Winter gales have brought two species of prions fluttering wearily among unyielding obstacles. An interest which began at school might lead to an appreciation of the value of counting local populations; of the significance - even perhaps the romance of bird-migration and the thrill of finding something rare and unusual. Perhaps a few examples may be cited. After the winter gales of 1946 Peter Williams recovered fragments and skulls of wrecked sea birds from Miti-miti beach, north of Hokianga. Among them was a South Polar Skua, the identity of which was confirmed by Dr R A Falla. It became the third acceptable record for New Zealand. In 1948 Barrie Heather recorded, together with an admirable sketch, Taranaki's first White-faced Heron. In 1952 Hugh Davidson reported five Royal Spoonbills near Foxton. More recently Michael Morse in 1981 photographed in colour a Long-tailed Skua inland at Lake Taupo. The next year, while on his honeymoon, he added to his laurels with photographs of a Common Sandpiper as it fed along a Northland creek. There are grumblers who say "Some people have all the luck". The truth, of course, is that those who have trained eyes and alert minds, find. In 1947 when John Cunningham launched his survey of mynas, these rowdy aliens were logged and counted by many schoolboys as they had never been before.

A boarding school which has the welfare of its pupils sincerely at heart must cater for many tastes. There are usually some boys, especially among the seniors, for whom games in excessive doses, have lost their charm; yet they crave for physical exercise with a purpose. King's was fortunately placed in that, less than half an hour's cycling distance away, was the old causeway, which crossed by firm tidal flats and shell-banks to Puketutu Island, a historic winter habitat for the endemic Wrybilled Plover. This ecologically rich area of the Manukau Harbour had formerly been locally famous for its curlew (=godwit) shooting,

and in 1940 was still dotted with the enduring basalt-maimais of the hunters, whose late summer barrage scared away many other species of migratory waders, even if it did not kill them. However, with the outlawing of shore-bird shooting, the numbers of over-wintering waders began to rise. In 1940 only eighteen Wrybills could be found. That was exiting enough. But next winter the number rose to 32 and in 1942 the size of the flock over four months stayed about 60 (Emu. 1943.43: 41-62). By 1950 the wintering tally was about 240.

An hour or two's freedom from classroom, sport, battalion drill, and 'prep', could be spent happily and usefully - and often was - by following the advice "Jump on your bike and count the Wrybills and, of course , report on anything else". Young finders soon learnt to interpret the tide-tables. At least one aspiring young artist made a charming sketch of scattered Wrybills on a favoured stretch of foreshore. (The framed picture by Jack Grant hangs in my study).

Another boy to be charmed by Wrybills was Gordon Nicholls. He visited the library of the Auckland Institute and Museum and from a valuable tome, published in 1830, skilfully copied C G Pretre's coloured engraving of the first Wrybill known to science.

In 1941 three younger members of the King's Staff had come to realise something of the ornithological potential of the Firth of Thames. Soon they had enlisted Ross McKenzie. When the sombre winter term of 1942 ended, a group of senior boys, cajoled by a mildly eccentric master and eager for something more stimulating than suburban Auckland, set off for Miranda and the west coast of the Firth of Thames. Teased by fleas, the cycling explorers spent the first night up the Ness Valley in Ross and Hetty McKenzie's haybarn. Next day heavy rain over "the Khyber Pass" swelled the stony unbridged streams of the Hunua Range. The Firth was reached and in the afternoon the sun shone. Kaiaua provided huge and plentiful snapper for ravenous appetites. The friendly manager of the busy limeworks offered dry accommodation in his outbuildings; and at his forge skilfully straightened or welded any buckled bikes. Shorebirds

were plentiful, but the pursuit of them was somewhat light-hearted. Basically the trip was a modest adventure, aimed at a broadening of horizons. Now more than forty years on, those who took the plunge, remember with merriment the road to Miranda. Most of them have served, or are still serving, with distinction in one of many fields, medicine, scientific research, architecture, local government, sport.

The end of W.W. 11 was the lifting of a cloud. Once again youth could travel in hope. The later 1940's saw the emergence of several youngsters to whom watching birds was to become a life-interest. After Sandy Edgar, not yet firmly recovered from the privations of imprisonment at the hands of the Japanese, had returned to New Zealand, F.M. Brookfield (Jock) was deputed to look after him on a trip to Tiritiri. From 1953-56 Jock served as the Society's Hon. Sec; during which time he was one of a puzzled trio who found flitting over the Miranda pools a marsh tern, later identified as a White-winged Black, in sub-adult plumage. When he went to Europe to further his education, he was climbing on Mt Olympus, doubtless looking for the gods of Ancient Greece, and suddenly found beside him that most exquisite bird, a Wallcreeper. Jock, now a Professor of Law at the University of Auckland, regrets he has little time for the therapy of bird-watching.

Papatoetoe crater-lake, now, alas, drained and partly quarried , was a happy mixture of open water and dense beds of raupo. Near the centre was an islet, actually the tip of a small volcanic cone, with trees on it. From this unspoilt wilderness emerged avian noises which stirred thoughts of Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'; and the feeling was heightened when the air was filled with the whirring wings of ducks, little shags and pukekos while slow flapping bitterns rose to circle overhead. This gem of primitive New Zealand fascinated William Hunt who found time to slip away and hunt for nests among the raupo. He had a veritable colony of bitterns under observation and in December 1946 could lead the way to five nests, all with eggs or young or both.

Donald Urquhart while still a schoolboy was a man of action. Farm machinery and cameras were grist to the mill of his inventive mind. In the mid-1940s he put the south coast of Manukau Harbour firmly on the ornithological map with reports of migratory behaviour and the discovery that many Wrybills were in the habit of wintering there. Often he was able to back his reports with photographs. The family farm ran down to the shore where he sank a sturdy hide deep into one of the shellbanks, where thousands of waders gather at full tide. He put the hide at the disposal of other well-known photographers. In the years to come Donald himself became a highly-skilled photographer. He presented to the Auckland Museum copies of vivid 16mm colour-films of godwits, knots and other shore-birds at a high-tide roost. Elsewhere he was called in to take the first photographs in New Zealand of Terek, Marsh and Broad-billed Sandpipers. Many of his photographs have appeared in Notornis. His pictures of a Broad-billed Sandpiper aroused such interest that the editors of British Birds requested permission to use one of them in their journal.

By 1946 it was possible to plan something a little more ambitious than day excursions to Rangitoto or other inner islands of the Hauraki Gulf. The time had come to fulfil a dream and take bold steps to land and stay on some of those outlying islands which had long been beckoning so temptingly. Little Barrier, which oddly enough at that time was under the jurisdiction of the Government Tourist Department, was first choice. The Club's first application for permission was rejected; but there was a bureaucratic change of heart when it was pointed out that the Club was in earnest and a locked-up treasure house was of little value if the quality of its contents was not known and available for study. And so, at crack of dawn on 16/12/46, five boys and one master with Ross McKenzie as botanical adviser sailed from Leigh on Norman Warren's sturdy 'Gunner' to be warmly welcomed two hours later by Charlie and May Parkin, the diligent guardians of the island. In those days the arrival of visitors was something of an event. In the years to come many bird-watchers were to go island-hopping in

'Gunner' and to marvel at the skipper's understanding of wind, weather and tides in the Hauraki Gulf.

An account of this precedent-setting trip was published in N.Z. Bird Notes 1947 Vol. 2. Special attention was paid to assessing the status of the passerines both native and foreign in the gullies and on the ridges of the south-west sector of the island, and it was established that Stitch birds were present from sea-level to the higher ridges. Donald Urquhart and William Hunt, two rugged country lads, were in a trio, who shared the enviable experience of spending a night near the summit amid the clamour of incoming Black and Cook's Petrels. In its report the Club stressed the losses being inflicted on breeding petrels by feral cats even on the higher ridges. Lower down very few petrels were able to fledge young.

It may be of interest briefly to sketch the careers of the five boys. Judd Davy, a born handyman, was soon busy on the island repairing the temperamental milking machine. He went on to pioneer tours by boat and plane on the Volcanic Plateau. After training at Cambridge University, Michael Houghton was ordained into the Anglican Church and became an Archdeacon. Now Vicar of Waiheke he is a frequent visitor to Great Barrier which is in his parish. "Tommy Tucker" on qualifying as a physician, went to the Chatham Islands, where it is said that he took the G.P.'s car into places where it had never been taken before. While working on the family farm in the King Country, 'Wif' Hunt found time to become ski champion of N.Z. and to captain our national Olympic Team. Donald Urquhart still finds relaxation in scrutinising the thousands of migrants which seasonally visit the fringes of his historic home on the southern shore of Manukau Harbour. A trio of Greenshanks which he found in 1953 gave many people much pleasure. This trio was till 1989 the biggest "flock" of Greenshanks recorded in New Zealand.

Next year in response to a lively demand for more of the same treatment, the Club organised a rather larger party which left Leigh on 29th December and stayed on Little Barrier well into the New Year. The weather was variable and

the waters of the Hauraki Gulf were less than benign than on the 1946 crossings. This expedition is especially to be remembered because one showery day two panting boys, Barrie Heather and Mark Hanna arrived back in camp with the news that they had found a Stitchbird's nest (N.Z.B.N. 3:154-155). The team took turns in watching the adults at the nest which was handily sited for discreet observation; and apparently was the first to come under human scrutiny since Guthrie Smith's visit in the spring of 1919. One other event sticks in the memory. Just below the summit John Davenport extracted a large protesting kiwi from a burrow, theoretically owned by Black Petrels. His love of birds has continued. For a time he was Regional Rep. for Auckland, helping to organise the first winter and summer censuses of waders in Manukau Harbour. He also served on the Council of the Society. After he left Auckland, his repeated observations showed that Little Terns were annual visitors to the Bay of Plenty, as they are now known to be elsewhere.

After such an auspicious beginning an annual island-trip came to be expected. Next on the list was the Hen Island where a team of eight was accompanied by Dr O.F. Lamb who tended our scratches, brought his solid clinker-built dinghy and kept us liberally supplied with fish. Between 1949 and 1958 he escaped from a suburban practice and was a loved member of the Club on Hen Island (1949 and 1954) Little Barrier (1952) Cavallis (1951) Big Chicken (1953 and 1957) and Poor Knights (Tawhitirahi) (1958). On some expeditions the club was glad to be strengthened by the presence of Old Boys who were good practical men. For instance, when we visited Hen Island in 1949 we knew that drinking water might be a problem; but immediately on landing, Donald Urquhart using a sketch map made by Major Buddle, set to work to uncover a pool of fresh running water where the tides and gales of many years had buried it under boulders. In the same way on Big Chicken in 1953, he was the first to break through a barrier of flax which fringed the bay and to find level ground, where tents could be pitched, and a debris-choked water-hole made usable. Behind the flax and beneath the

tall trees was a terraced Maori pa, long abandoned by man and now the home of many tuataras, petrels and penguins.

Ross McKenzie had been our first guest member. In 1958 Fred Kinsky of the Dominion Museum joined us on the Poor Knights. Since he had come from eastern Europe, this was a wholly new experience for him. He was heard to say that New Zealand boys didn't realise how lucky they were in that they could take part in such an adventure. On the Club's third trip to Big Chicken (1962) - by now we knew what to expect - Don Merton of the Wildlife Service came to help us in assessing the quality of the island. He was with us again in 1965 on Red Mercury. Don was destined to become a world authority on the salvaging of rare and endangered birds. In the Queen's Birthday Honours (1989) he received a Q.S.M. Dick Veitch was another of the gifted country lads who had his baptism of the islands on Big Chicken (1957) and Poor Knights (1958).

Some members of the Club, like Fleckers's pilgrims were eager "always to go a little further". On returning from Hen Island in January 1949, Donald Urquhart, in a long suffering farm-car took Barrie Heather and your chronicler across country to explore the long twisting Okahukura peninsula to the heart of the Kaipara Harbour. Our most rewarding discovery was a sizable shallow lake, teaming with waterfowl among which were Scaup and Shevalers with broads and several pairs of Dabchicks. In the interests of pastoral farming the lake has long been drained. It could easily be reflooded. Now in 1989 members of the Society find it worthwhile to visit mid-Kaipara with some regularity.

During a spell back on the Staff at King's, Barrie Heather put together much of "A Biology of Birds", which first appeared in 1963 as a section of an enlightened and ambitious text book on the teaching of Biology in schools.

Some excerpts from a diary in July 1949 are:

July 11 Bird Club out to Muriwai after much squally weather from the west. Eleven species of tubenoses mostly recent, including Cape

Pigeon and Hutton's Shearwater. A few days ago John Davenport found what Oliver calls a Silver-grey Petrel ie. Southern Fulmer.

July 12 Bruno Nicholls, a promising pianist, brought in two albatrosses from Piha, a Wanderer and a juv. Grey-Headed.

July 17 John Morris reported 167 Wrybills at Puketutu causeway, where Noel Gleeson was taking photographs.

July 24 Barrie Heather reports a Blue Petrel, found at Piha on July 17.

July 26 Frequency and volume of Chaffinch song increasing. Mob of Stilts after dark, calling noisily over the school; possibly leaving winter-quarters on the isthmus and heading south for breeding grounds.

Forty years after leaving school Neil Pirrit writes from his farm at Broadlands on the Volcanic Plateau that Spur-winged Plovers are now numerous and very territorial. "They attack both hawks and magpies if they feel like it. They are very raucous when disturbed; and I can well believe they have come from Australia!" which Australians may say is a typical comment from a prejudiced New Zealander.

When an injury to his neck stopped Richard Buttle from playing football, the need for brisk exercise turned him into a walker of west coast beaches and a critical examiner of tide-wrack. An expedition to the Covallis (1951) has fired his interest in natural history. In due course he was ordained into the Anglican Church and after serving as priest in a country parish returned to King's in 1969 as chaplain. He was well equipped to preach eloquently on such a text as "Consider the ravens" and his car was in demand for excursions to Miranda and Karaka.

When the Christmas card scheme was launched (v. A.C.Hipwell) in 1955, Bruce Chambers provided a business acumen which ensured the success of the project in its first years and strengthened the Society's finances. Later under Russell Thomas' guidance Christmas cards continued to make a valuable contribution. Meanwhile Russell had become treasurer of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

Subsequently when his career took him to Wellington, he was roped in to become Regional Rep. Bird-watching also took him to the Chathams, where his skill with a camera was very useful when a real live Majenta Petrel was caught and a 'lost' species was proved top be still alive and kicking. Bravo, David Crockett!

The Rutherford cousins, Scott and Vivian, were country lads from the Awhitu Peninsula, who revelled in the Club's activities; and took part in five island expeditions in the 1950s, eagerly returning as young Old Boys. Many years later Viv wrote "Coming from the free and easy country life, I found the confinement of King's College rather hard to bear, but through Bird Club I managed to cope. What a great inspiration that Club was". And he continues, "It is interesting to note how bird populations change over the years. When you first introduced us to beachcombing about 1950, Kerguelen and Blue Petrels were rare. Now they are regular visitors every winter". Now inter alia he notes the invasion of the Awhitu Peninsula by Spur-Winged Plovers.

In December 1956 when lack of time ruled out an island-trip, the parents of W.W. Smith invited us to stay in the family batch at Tinopai; and thence with the aid of their launch to explore some of the northern tentacles of that great octopus, Kaipara Harbour. We learnt how tides can race in the channels, caught some fine fish and searched in vain for petrel burrows beneath the scratchy scrub of some small islets. Although birding was not spectacular, the immensity of Kaipara brought home to us how little we knew of our own country.

In the August-September holiday of 1959 the Club broke new ground when Brian Bell, senior field officer of the Wildlife Division invited four members to share in a preliminary survey of the Alderman Islands. Mr A. Blackburn, President O.S.N.Z. and Dr Elizabeth Bowie were also in the team. The lucky boys were Tim Ledgard, Mike Hogg and Rick Sibson. With Dr. Lamb's sturdy dinghy we were able to examine the four main islands and learn much that was not known before. Since the islands rise steeply from the sea, all suitable slopes

were riddled with the burrows of nesting petrels. What an enchanting experience to sit quietly at nightfall in the midst of a whirling snowstorm of White-faced Stormies. Hundreds were caught and banded. There are few northern offshore islands where Fernbirds are known to occur. We located a flourishing population on a steep grassy slope on Ruamahuanui and a few in the dry scrub near the top of Ruamahuaiti. One idiosyncrasy of our cramped camp site among the litter at the top of a little bay was that a human intruder might wake up and find a displaced tuatara on his sleeping-bag. In linking learning with adventure, this was a very successful expedition. How many explorers can say they have camped and slept among living Dinosaurs?

Expeditions to explore the Mercury Islands in the Springs of 1961 and 1962 again combined experience with eager youth and cemented the alliance with the Wild-life Service. In very mixed weather, seven boys camped or landed on several islets of a relatively unknown group to survey and assess the bird and plant populations. The recorders were Sandy Edgar and Peter Skegg whose reports appear in Notornis.10. 1962-63. On the second visit Ian Atkinson, a King's Old Boy from D.S.I.R. was present to study and map the flora and to guide our steps in the realm of off-shore island botany. So captivated by Red Mercury was Peter Skegg that he organised a small expedition on his own a few months later and returned with the important news that the island was a stronghold of the relatively unknown Pycroft's Petrel. In December 1965 the Club returned taking Don Merton, John Jenkins and Peter Skegg to add stiffening. At our camp-site on Red Mercury, a Pycroft's Petrel attracted by the light of the evening lantern was a normal event. A nocturnal visit proved that Stanley Island also could be added to the list of 'Pycroft' islands.

The Wildlife Service was now assessing Red Mercury as a likely island for an experimental release of Saddlebacks, which first had to be captured by mist-nests on Hen Island. Some boys of the Club who already knew Hen Island were invited to take part in the capture under the leadership of Don Merton. This

they did only too readily. The experiment, after much field work and preparation, was highly successful. Red Mercury and other northern offshore islands now support flourishing populations of North Island (Rufusater) Saddlebacks. Since then Tim Lovegrove has been battling for some years to establish them on Kapiti. In the 1960s the Club's expeditions helped to prove that Red Mercury is a gem of an island. Little Grey Kiwis from Kapiti, as was suggested twenty years ago, have now been introduced with some confidence for midden bones show that Apteryx oweni once inhabited the Coromandel Peninsula not far away. We hope the Little Greys prosper.

During the 1960s, when the Club was not "islanding" with the Wildlife Service, it continued to organize its own offshore expeditions. Noel Baskett succeeded Dr. Lamb as our M.O. on Hen (1961) and Big Chicken (1962). Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Blanchard teams were invited to Little Barrier, once at the end of January (1963) and twice in December (1966 and 1967).

In 1965 when Mr Douglas Robinson took the bold step of planning a trip to Fiji, so that the upper school biologists could study tropical reefs, the Bird Club was also invited. This was a wonderful eye-opening opportunity for a trio of young ornithologists, David Walter, David Ewen, Anthony Hardingham especially as the two main camp-sites were in quite distinct climatic zones. In the south-west of Viti Levu a botanically-rich belt of coastal-forest remained to protect the cane-fields from sea breezes. Offshore a small forested island, Navo, was accessible at low tide. Five miles east of Suva Point and situated in the estuary of the Rewa, Fiji's largest river, the island of Nukulau, gave us a taste of a very different environment. Thanks to the good services of Mr (now Sir) Charles Stinson, we were able to bed down in the roomy building of the Royal Suva Yacht Club. A basic account, comparing the birds of Navo and Nukulau in their very different settings has been published.

Island- camping trips of which there were more than twenty between 1946 and 1972 had a glamour and excitement all of their own, especially if they were based

on groups like the Cavallis and Mercuries, whose biota was virtually unknown. Meanwhile, as the seasons came and went, there was plenty to keep young naturalists busy on the Auckland Isthmus. Whatever the lack of variety, except for the beginner, among the birds that have learnt to co-exist with men, cats, and opossums in a suburban environment, there were always the tidal waterways to bring a breath of sea-air a feeling of freedom and mixed flocks of shore-birds.
Sketching birds in the field or drawing them from prepared skins was encouraged. Arthur Hipwell was art master from 1936 to 1951. A man of great versatility, he loved to sketch herons or waders in pools along the seashore or to do a measured drawing in his studio of an unusual beach-cast petrel. In 1957 he won the Kelliher Art Prize. He contributed greatly to the Society's finances with his painting of birds for the Society's first Christmas cards (Notornis 12: 112). Later generations of boys owed much also to Max Jackson, an innovative and witty teacher with a fine sense of value and purpose of Art.

There were usually boys whose latent talent began to emerge at school. Jack Grants' evocative picture of Wrybills scattered over the sandy environs of the original Puketutu causeway, now has a historic value because what was a placid and a distinctive winter habitat now lies submerged below the large tainted ponds of the Auckland Metropolitan Drainage Board.
In 1947 Robert Gibbings, a distinguished English artist, writer and naturalist visited New Zealand and expressed a wish to see bitterns. The Bird Club at that time had its own 'tame' colony under observation at Seff's Pool, wrote offering to show him bitterns under ideal conditions. His time being short, he was unable to accept the invitation. Instead, he wrote enclosing a cheque for prizes for young bird artists.
The first winner of the Robert Gibbings Prize was Brian Irwin, now the esteemed and efficient headmaster of St Kentigern School. Among subsequent winners was Donald Binney, now nationally famous for his starkly vivid landscapes which

so often include a brilliantly stylised bird. Donald Binney has generously contributed some striking paintings in the cause of Conservation of Native Forest.

Keith Money whose home- garden ran down to L Pupuke, painted ponies, swans, shags and the coastal scenery of Whatipu and Manukau Heads, before he left New Zealand to turn a disused East Anglian windmill into his home.

Jonathan White, well known as a painter of New Zealand scenery in the traditional style, was privileged to spend time in the Takahe country with the Wildlife Service and came back with masterly sketches of those dramatic birds among the mountain tussock.

Barrie Heather, Michael Hogg, Tim Lovegrove, Geoffrey Arnold and Graham Cathie have made sketches, which have appeared in Notornis, of rare terns, petrels and waders.

Elaine Power, gifted illustrator of many books both on birds, including the New Field Guide, and on plants may be considered an honorary member. When the Club was entrusted with a dozen young Gisborne Wekas preparatory to local release, she spent some profitable hours with her sketch-book, observing them in their roomy pens at the college. Her husband Gerald is an Old Boy and would take her out in his launch so that she could view at close hand shearwaters and petrels over their natural element, the waters of the Hauraki Gulf.

Happily very competent artists continue to emerge. Even in his early teens Tim Lovegrove could earn pocket-money by selling paintings of Welcome Swallows which he knew well on a Northland farm. Now his coloured drawings of such island rarities as Saddleback, Stitchbird, Black Robin and others have become prized collectables. He is also a blue water yachtsman, whose logs are adorned with sketches of albatrosses and little known petrels, often seen at very close-range. His log of one long oceanic since won top prize. At the request of the New Zealand Herald Tim produced a popular handbook of Birds of Auckland. It was most ably illustrated with black and white drawings of congeneric species

which are likely to be confused. The booklet was quickly sold out, Tim generously giving the royalties to the Miranda Naturalists' Trust, for which he also designed its appropriate and now well known emblem, a Godwit and a Wrybill.

It is encouraging to know that the artistic tradition is being carried on by Geoffrey Arnold, whose interest in ornithology began before he came to King's and whose versatility is exemplified in the elegantly designed brochure for the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Appeal and in programmes for various good causes, as well as in forthright detailed paintings.

The hope that with increasing knowledge and experience the lure of bird-watching would continue and that some ex-members of the Club would make a real contribution to the Society has been amply fulfilled. Charles Fleming was the driving force behind the publication of the 1953 Checklist. In the mid 1950s Jock Brookfield stepped into the breach to become Honorary Secretary and John Davenport as Regional Representative for Auckland helped to initiate the summer and winter censuses of Manukau Harbour, which have now been maintained for more than thirty years. On the Awhitu Peninsula the Rutherford cousins still report unusual casualties after rough weather. One very important service has been the compiling of the Index to Notornis. Peter Skegg, David Fenwick, Chris Barlow and Tim Lovegrove in succession have faithfully undertaken this exacting duty where a little knowledge of Latin and scientific nomenclature is a necessary aid. In 1964, while the editor was absent overseas, Barrie Heather acted for him; and in 1978 when the editorship again fell vacant, he was nominated for that thankless responsibility and accepted happily. Now for twelve years he has tackled the task with judgment and meticulous care, always fighting the battle for contributions written not in jargon but in well phrased English. It is not an easy battle to win.

When Stuart Chambers was a regular writer for the New Zealand Farmer, the theme of birds was frequently sounded in his articles. His philosophy of farming

is summed up in a book, "The Way of the Farmer". Such was his reputation that he was chosen to go as an adviser in agriculture to the government of Tanzania. He found the rich variety of African birds quite overwhelming, but very stimulating. He is now the very active president of the Miranda Naturtalists' Trust.

Richard Veitch developed a taste for outlying islands at the Chickens (1957) and Poor Knights (1958). On leaving school he joined the Wildlife Service. In due course he was the brains and much of the muscle for the purging of Little Barrier, which was a sanctuary only in name as long as feral cats were preying on its rare wild birds. Thanks to his dogged and ruthless campaign, its Black and Cook's Petrels, Penguins, Parrots and endemic passerines may now live as Nature intended them to live. Dick has been a member of a team which has been striving, often in rugged and inhospitable country to salvage the remnants of some of New Zealand's endangered birds. The value of the achievements of the Wildlife Service is now recognised internationally. Dick is one of those who have been invited to visit and advise on measures to be taken to protect rare and endangered species on remote islands such as the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. Dick also has to his credit two notable books, "Black Robin Country" and "Kakapo Country" both most sensitively illustrated by his friend, the English artist, David Cemmick.

Michael Gill was a fine scholar who loved lofty places. He quickly graduated from sandpipers at Miranda to the ridges of Little Barrier (1952) and Big Chicken (1953). Having qualified as a physician, he became a noted mountaineer. Some of his experiences are vividly-recounted in "Mountain Midsummer" 1969. High in the Himalayas he would watch the soaring vultures watching him and his fellow climbers. In Antarctica he would sympathise with the penguins as they trekked across the ice.

Dean Eyre's love of adventure took him to Hen Island (1957) and Mayor (1955). On leaving school he joined R. N.Z.N.V.R. and on completing his degree in

medicine, he served as M.O. on an antarctic cruise where Alexander's 'Birds of the Ocean' became a trusted book of reference. For some years now the migrations of Canadian birds at Ottawa have been among his interests.

Tim Ledgard, a veteran of the Aldermans (1959) had a deep-seated rapport with animals and a keen eye for noting subtle differences, e.g. a large Sand Dotterel among Banded Dotterels or the fragmented skeleton of a beach-wrecked White Tern Gygis alba. Once after an icy leaf-stripping gale had swept through the oaks where the local sparrows roosted, Tim's study became an aviary and he would arrive in class, his pullover bulging with sodden shivering bundles of feathers. Tim was a most able linguist and became Dux of the School. He took his Degree at Cambridge University whence he wrote happily that his lodgings were handily situated on the road to the sewage farm which had earned a reputation for attracting migratory birds of many kinds. While still at school he witnessed the start of an ambitious A.M.D.B. scheme which was to change the character of the Puketutu tidal flat, and he was among those who were thrilled by New Zealand's first recorded Marsh Sandpiper (Notornis 8:125-126). On completion of his degree in literature, itchy feet took him to West Africa. In due course he returned to England, where his talents and experience secured for him the headmastership of a Co-educational school at Atherstone in the Midlands.

Tim's young brother Nick was also a dedicated islander, beach-comber and bushman, well qualified to be a member of Don Merton's team which was learning how to catch Saddlebacks and transfer them from Hen to other islands. A love of trees took him to Wales where he qualified as a forester. Back in New Zealand he worked with the F.R.I. in the South Island, and incidentally, made an archaeological find of some importance. More recently when Sir Edmund Hillary appealed for N. Z. foresters to advise the government of Nepal on replanting the denuded slopes of the lower Himalayas, Nick was one of those selected and typically seized the opportunity to visit a lofty part of the world, all

the more stimulating for him because of its many coloured minivets and flycatchers.

From his schooldays David Walter was a naturalist with an eye for the unusual. Now he farms in the rugged country where the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flourish south of the Waikato estuary. As a change from New Zealand and to further his education, he drove trucks and worked as a jackaroo in Australia. In a swamp on his farm he surprised the expert botanists by finding a healthy patch of Ragged Robin, a scarce adventive; and he keeps an eye on Coromandel's rare celmesias, which have so far survived the assaults of alien browsers. He was among the first to find a Dunlin in New Zealand (Notornis 22:241-243). For some years he has served on the Council of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

As a schoolboy Mike Hogg was a front-runner for any island trip between 1959 and 1962. It is, therefore, not surprising that he was accepted as a member of the Society's twenty-fifth anniversary expedition to the Kermadecs in November 1964. It is now a matter of history that a few days after Don Merton's team landed, the local volcano began to blow its top and the expedition had to be abruptly terminated, but not before some graphic photographs were taken of the eruption (Notornis 12:3-43). Now a globe-trotting attorney in U.S. Mike re-appears in New Zealand from time to time. A collector of field-guides, he is still a critical bird-watcher. His duties take him from continent to continent. He likes to know just what birds to expect and exactly what birds he has found during spells of relaxation between business appointments. His life-list is truly impressive.

Rick Sibson was a hardened islander when he was invited to join Don Merton's historic Saddlerback transfer team. Now a quarter of a century later, geology has enabled him to cast his net wide, from searing deserts to arctic wildernesses. Along the sea-shore of California he may offer his students, as light relief from fractures and fossilised earthquakes, Snowy Plovers or Black Turnstones. Though he finds exhilaration as he soars on a hang-glider over the escarpment of

the coastal ranges, he is humbled by the effortless efficiency of Red-tailed Buzzards and Turkey Vultures, as they use the same thermals, Saddlebacks are still his favourite birds but the power-gliding of the Fulmars of Britain's sea-cliffs draws gasps of admiration.

The study of birds obsessed Paul Scofield from his early boyhood and he was quick to learn the potential of the Auckland Isthmus. A truly exciting opportunity came his way when he joined Gerry Clark at Cape Town in 1985 and, after a very hazardous passage, a battered Totorore reached Marion Island where South Africa has a scientific observatory. Totorore and her crew of three were received with astonishment and warmly welcomed. For Paul the sojourn on Marion Island was a young ornithologist's taste of Paradise. Asked what most impressed him he replied (1) the size of the colonies of King and Macaroni Penguins (2) Sooty and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses nesting virtually side by side, but with different annual cycles and no evidence of inter-breeding (3) the tameness, voracity and unique charm of Sheathbills, despite some rather disgusting traits of behaviour (4) the similarity of Kerguelen Terns to the 'Ploughboys' of South Island riverbeds, both in appearance and in feeding behaviour as distinct from Antarctic Terns. Paul's knowledge and enthusiasm so impressed the South Africans that on his return to Cape Town he was invited to join a team which was going to Gough Island in the South Atlantic, a rare experience for a New Zealander; and so he became familiar with the endemic Gough Island Rail and Bunting; and from his observations on Kerguelen Petrels which were breeding on Gough, he felt that they are indeed very different from the "gadflies", among which they are normally placed, and have a uniqueness all their own. Now back in Auckland he is heading for his M. Sc. and has been associated with Mike Imber on a study of the Black Petrels of Little and Great Barrier Islands. They are hoping their work will ensure the survival of this rare Petrel which breeds only in New Zealand: but ranges far across the Pacific to waters off the western coasts of America.

In the mid-1960's a small group faithfully carried the torch. Chris Barlow is now a pilot with Air New Zealand, flying higher and faster than any of the many migratory shore birds he knew as a schoolboy. Bruce McMillan earned a degree in science and worked with the Ecology Division of D.S.I.R. studying the relation between introduced birds and farming, especially in Hawkes Bay. Now seconded to the A.R.A. his domain is the Hunua Range, with special reference to Kokako and other vulnerable native species.

When Simon Towle joined the club in 1970, he brought with him some experience of aviculture. His enthusiasm had soon persuaded his fellow-members - true farm lads love an opportunity to handle tools - to construct roomy pens in which to house pairs of Golden and Silver Pheasants. These very decorative birds attracted much attention; and wonderful to tell, despite many admiring visitors, the rather less-forthcoming Silvers bred and raised two strapping youngsters. At that time in New Zealand this was acclaimed as no mean feat.

Since then Simon's varied career has taken him to many out-of-the-way places, including the Poor Knights and Codfish Islands and recently the Ross Dependency. Currently he is writing reports for three Government Departments on rubbish and pollution in Antarctica. He is expected to spend more time there in 1990.

It is fitting that the club should acknowledge the active support and encouragement given over many years by many well-wishers. On the staff H.T. Revell, E.F. Dodson and W. Ridland assisted with local excursions in the 1940s. In later years the cars of padres Sinclair, Hulme and Buttle were made available for visits to Miranda and Karaka. The Bursar, Mr N.L. Fitzpatrick could be relied on to provide basic rations as the occasion demanded. And never far off was the eye of the Headmaster, benevolent or otherwise, watching the extra curricular antics of the mudlarks.

Among parents the Club was especially grateful to H.W. Parkinson, J.M. Ewen, J.M. Butland whose launches furthered our modest explorations by landing us on some of the inner rocky islets of the Hauraki Gulf. Among the professional and highly skilled boatmen who are remembered with gratitude and whose sturdy vessels carried us on our more distant island-trips were:- Norman Warren of Leigh, Tommy Roberts of Whangaroa, Curly Steedman of Tauranga, Hugh Going of Tutukaka, Wally Findlater of Whangamata, Tim Butterworth of Mercury Bay and H.L. Julian of Auckland. Many Old Boys, now not so young, have memories of putting to sea on 'Gunner' or 'Lone Star' or 'Kitty Vane' or 'Doris' or 'Sea Toiler' or the weather-worn fishing-boat which they came to know affectionately as "The Iron Lung".

Once the Club had begun to work closely with the Wildlife Service, most of the problems of transport were solved. Our carriers were either the patrol vessels of the R.N.Z. N. or else the 'workhorse' vessels of the R.N.Z. Fleet Auxiliary. How well the skippers and their crews looked after us! Who that tasted will ever forget Bill the Burglar's generous helpings of steak and fried onions? And once, just before Christmas, we were expected to share the Navy's festal rum-ration.

On the Auckland Isthmus as the Club's outings spread further afield, many parents helped with cars. Especially deserving of mention are:- Mrs E.A. Urquhart, Dr Elizabeth Hughes, Mrs H.J. Short, Mr and Mrs G.C. Davenport, Mr and Mrs C.W. Smith, Mr and Mrs Garth Ledgard, Mrs F.R. Barlow, Mr and Mrs A.H. Winstone, Professor V.J. Chapman, Mr and Mrs John Towle, Mr and Mrs R.S. Morse. For the identification and preservation of beach-cast sea-birds and other specimens, help was readily given by the Auckland War Memorial Museum, especially from Dr (Later Sir) Gilbert Archy and Mr E.G. Turbott Q.S.O.

Hundreds of boys took part in field trips and learnt, we hope, to distinguish a knot from a dotterel and a pipit from a skylark.

More than a hundred enjoyed the opportunity to feel the wonder of the unspoilt New Zealand on more than twenty adventurous forays to the more inaccessible islands of the Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Plenty. Year by year such activities were duly chronicled in the school magazine and the significant findings were reported in Notornis. The notes for 1959 end as follows:- "The important things are to get out in the field; observe with a critical eye; make notes; draw if you can; and above all, get some fun out of your bird-watching." There are now few lands where former members of the Club have not been cheered - or puzzled - at the sight of a bird which was either an old friend or up till that moment was outside their experience.

Floreant semper aves atque spectatores.